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Remarks (as prepared)

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and thanks Sarah for the introduction and the opportunity to speak here today. It's a pleasure to join everyone here at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Although Sarah and I met in December at the Pentagon, this is the first time I've been here. Thanks for inviting me over.

Let me begin with a few thoughts as both a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then as a service chief.

First, I believe that our nation is at a strategic inflection point.

By the end of this year, we will have concluded the longest war in our Nation's history.

We are confronted by economic challenges amidst a world that is characterized by competition for natural resources, increased prevalence and severity of natural disasters, social unrest throughout the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa, cyber-attacks, violent extremism, regional conflicts, and the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Intelligence estimates indicate that more than half of the world's population live in fragile states - vulnerable to ruinous economic, ideological, and environmental stresses.

In many regions, ever-present local instability will inevitably erupt into crises, prompting calls for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation or perhaps more vigorous responses.

Many parts of the world remain dangerous places.

The rapid increase of globalization and reliance on computer networks gives both rogue nation states and other malign actors increased ability to impact our daily lives.

In this challenging environment, a "new normal" is beginning to emerge...and because of this, my sense is that there will be no peace dividend following our conclusion of combat operations in Afghanistan later this year.

The world will remain a dangerous place.

And while we, as a nation, may be done with the thorny and nasty entanglements of the new normal...they are likely not done with us.

There will be no shortage of work for America's Marines.

That said, both here in the Beltway, and across the nation, there is a national dialog beginning to emerge about what the American people want their military to do in the future.

After 12 years of war, some believe that it's time for America to furl the flag and come home. I understand that sentiment, and the sense of fatigue behind it.

While wariness of foreign entanglements is a healthy American instinct, almost a pastime, I argue that we cannot afford to disengage from the world.

In many critical areas, only the United States has the ability and the will to lead the world through some of its thorniest challenges.

Given the fiscal realities of our budgetary challenges, the question of necessity then becomes ...where do we engage...and how much?

From my perspective, the United States must retain a global presence...a presence that is vital to deterring aggression...one that underwrites a stable global economy...and one that builds trust amongst our allies and partners.

This forward presence allows us to build strategic relationships that truly matter when the chips are down...when time is short...and when lives are on the line – just like we saw recently in the Philippines and in South Sudan.

I've heard some in the Pentagon attempt to advance a concept of "virtual presence." Ladies and gentlemen, this is pure folly. "Virtual presence" is actual absence. You have to be there in person to make a relationship work.

The truth is that you can't surge trust!

I believe that the Marine Corps is America's insurance policy. We buy insurance for our cars, our homes, and our very lives as a hedge against uncertainty...a hedge against the unknown.

The same logic applies to our nation.

None of us can predict when or where the next crisis might arise...but when it does, our nation needs to be able to address the matter quickly and efficiently in line with our national interests.

Lastly, allow me to talk a bit about Afghanistan.

We are coming out of Afghanistan about as well as we can expect. As far as the mission goes...we exceeded expectations!

None of us know how the future will turn...there are simply too many variables. The NATO Ministerial Meetings at the end of this month are critical.

That said, I believe that we need to be very circumspect and take a lesson from Iraq.

We spent our nation's treasure there...and then we pulled out. It's yet to be seen how Iraq is going to turn out...I don't want that to happen to Afghanistan.

In fact, I would argue that when viewing Afghanistan and Pakistan as a whole-set-piece that we can ill afford to simply pull out and go home.

Now...a couple of comments about your Marine Corps...

After a decade at war in the most morally and physically bruising environment...the arena of human combat...we are resetting the Marine Corps mentally, physically and morally.

We have 75% of our equipment out of Afghanistan now, with most of it headed to our Depots for overhaul. We are realigning equipment and our battalions and squadrons back out to the Pacific Area of Responsibility to meet the President's Defense Strategy.

To address where our institutional fabric has frayed, we have instituted an effort we call the Reawakening." It focuses on returning our Marines' back to the eternal attributes that has served us so well for 238 years: discipline... adherence to instructions...concerned and engaged leadership (24/7)...and obedience to orders. There's nothing new here...simply a return to those attributes that define who we are as Marines.

Thank you for indulging my opening remarks...Sarah, I think this is a good time for us to open the floor to questions.